WINCHESTER NEWS
A TRUSTED AND RELIABLE SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS

Donate

DONATE | NEWS | SPORTS | EVENTS | FEATURES | OPINION | NEWSLETTER | CONTACT | ABOUT

NEWS

Winchester budget faces pressures from health, school needs

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

January 16, 2025 . 6:00 AM — 3 min read

Town Manager Beth Rudolph, center, says Winchester faces budgetary pressures from health and school needs. Rudolph explained the issues facing the town during a recent Financial Summit with town boards. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/WILL DOWD

Subscribe

As Winchester enters its fiscal year 2026 budget season, officials [illegible] last week for a Financial Summit revealing preliminary figures that project

approximately $152.7 million in revenues against growing expenses, pointing to a potential deficit exceeding $3 million.

The revenue outlook includes $127.6 million from property taxes, a preliminary estimate of $13 million in state aid (pending the governor's budget proposal in late January), and $11.1 million in local receipts.

Major expenses include $34.9 million for municipal departments and a $64.8 million school budget projecting a 5.84% increase, alongside sharply rising health insurance costs.

Town Manager Beth Rudolph detailed how health insurance rates are expected to increase 10% for active employees and 15-17% for retirees in FY26. The Medicare supplemental plan increases came as a particular shock, as the town had budgeted for only a 5% rise based on historical averages.

"Unfortunately, it comes at the same time as we're expecting a large increase in our active plan renewal rate. It's kind of a double whammy," Rudolph said, noting the town may need additional funds in fiscal year 2025 to cover the unexpected increases.

Property tax growth remains constrained by the 2.5% levy limit, with new growth projections reduced to $800,000 for FY26. Parking meter revenues continue lagging because of changed commuting patterns and MBTA construction impacts.

The School Department presented a preliminary "maintenance of effort" budget showing a 5.84% increase. Superintendent Dr. Frank Hackett emphasized this represents basic operational needs without new initiatives.

Subscribe

“We’re just so personnel-based, and our actual expenditures around supplies and equipment are very low,” Hackett said. “The revenue picture is different for other school systems — a lot different — so that’s always the challenge.”

The town has identified several potential revenue sources, including $350,000 in overlay funds and $257,414 from unused wage accounts.

Join your neighbors by subscribing to our free weekly newsletter!

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior suggested exploring expanded commercial hauler access at the transfer station.

“We actually have permitted excess capacity that we could receive and ship off,” Prior said. “If there’s a way to monetize the capacity that we have and the investment that the town made … I’d like the Select Board to consider what that looks like.”

School Committee member Chris Nixon highlighted enrollment pressures from new development.

“Based on current projections, instead of 24 to 25 [elementary students] we’re anticipating closer to 55,” Nixon said, of the River Street development, noting only five or six are district transfers. “Housing development is bringing families with kids, and they are new to Winchester.”

The town has strategically deployed its $6.8 million in ARPA funding, focusing heavily on municipal and school building improvements.

Subscribe

Capital Planning Committee Chair Roger McPeek noted the town has committed about $15.6 million to capital projects this year through various funding sources.

Major capital needs include Town Hall HVAC and ADA improvements, Lincoln School site work and chiller replacement, and two new fire trucks planned for fiscal year 2028 and fiscal year 2029. Officials hope the newly passed Community Preservation Act will help fund some projects.

Select Board member Michael Bettencourt noted the broader context of rising costs.

“Look at water and sewer costs. We’re looking at school fees going up, transfer station fees. It’s not just taxes that are increasing, but it’s kind of all the other pieces as well,” he said.

A special education reserve fund of $458,880 exists, but can only be used for unexpected mid-year costs.

Prior emphasized the preliminary nature of these budget projections.

“We don’t know state aid until the end of January when [the House budget] gets published. We don’t know final insurance costs until April. We may not know retirements until April or May,” she said. “What we know now in January isn’t where we’re going to land.”

The town manager will present a detailed budget proposal by Feb. 15, initiating a review process leading to Town Meeting in May.

While Winchester maintains strong fiscal health overall, including operating reserves at 20% of the budget, officials acknowledged addressing structural challenges will require careful planning.

Subscribe

Winchester News is a non-profit organization supported by our community. If you appreciate having local Winchester news, please donate to support our work, and subscribe to our free weekly newsletter.

Related

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

Subscribe

NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

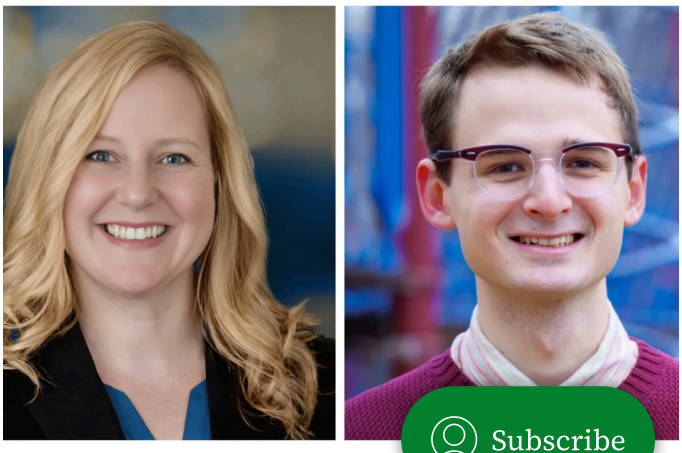
The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

March 3, 2026

Latest

PROMOTING HEALTH & EMPOWERMENT
HEAR FROM HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS
LEARN THROUGH INTERACTIVE GAMES
MEET NEW PEOPLE
FREE AND OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY
Middle school & high school students, teachers, parents, friends, community members - come and bring a friend!
FOR MORE INFORMATION:
EMAIL OFFICE@NFSJ.ORG
CALL 781-729-7100
NETWORK for SOCIAL JUSTICE
FROM WINCHESTER AND CHELSEA
GIRL UP
WOMEN IN STEM
GIRLS GOTTA RUN
MIND & MATTER

EVENTS



NEWS

Subscribe

Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

Subscribe

WINCHESTER NEWS
A TRUSTED AND RELIABLE SOURCE OF LOCAL NEWS

Subscribe to Winchester News

© 2026 Winchester News Group, Inc. Copying and sharing with permission for non-commercial use only.

Subscribe